Tribute to Rona R. Mears

Timothy Powers

It is, indeed, an honor and privilege for me to provide a public tribute to my colleague, partner, mentor and friend, Rona R. Mears.

As a young associate brand new to Haynes and Boone in August 1982, I remember being told that I would soon be joined by a new associate, doubling the ranks of our fledgling international department. This woman, so I was told, had the perfect pedigree. She was close to, and well-respected by, our founder Richard Haynes, and she would be launching her second career when she joined the firm. I must admit I was a bit nervous. Little did I realize the influence that this amazing woman would have on me personally, on our firm, and on the development of the practice of international law.

First and foremost, Rona Mears was a lawyer's lawyer. She was the lawyer to whom other lawyers turned for answers to difficult questions, for innovative solutions and for guidance in doing the right thing. Rona epitomized the teamwork culture of our firm, as well as the humility that it holds as a virtue. The best interest of Haynes and Boone was always foremost for Rona. No job was too big or too small, so long as the result was superior work for our clients and the betterment of the firm. She never sought the limelight for the work she did, but somehow the limelight always did seem to find her and rightly recognize her accomplishments.

From our very first project together, Rona instinctively knew how to find answers to the most difficult questions. She could also anticipate the myriad of twists and turns a project might take well in advance of the rest of us. And she gave the client and her peers the guidance necessary to take full advantage of the circumstance. Never was that more apparent than in the high-profile case in which she identified the treaty that served as the basis for the rightful return to Germany of the Quedlinberg treasury.

Rona also excelled at professional leadership. She authored the initial model international insolvency cooperation act that has served as the basis for the laws and treaties that now govern that area of law. She tirelessly wrote and taught on developing topics of international law. And she chaired the international law sections of the Dallas, State Bar of Texas and American Bar Associations. Along the way, Rona naturally became an early leader and role model for women in the law. In fact, Rona always led in a way that others admired and wanted to emulate. The dedication and care that she gave to each of these

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endeavors was exceptional, and she always placed the good of the cause above herself. Ultimately, her leadership among women in the profession was recognized with the Mayre J. Rasmussen Award for the Advancement of Women in International Law and Practice in 2001.

Upon her retirement from the firm, Rona was given a plaque by our firm’s women partners that recognized her leadership skills. On it was inscribed, “A true leader has the confidence to stand alone, the courage to make tough decisions, and the compassion to listen to the needs of others. She does not set out to be a leader, but becomes one by the quality of her actions and the integrity of her intent.” Those words accurately mirrored Rona’s intent throughout her life. Mission accomplished.

Within our firm Rona always pushed for innovation, and for our firm to be unique. As chair of our firm’s Latin America practice, Rona was the driving force in our firm’s entry into the Mexican legal market and opening of its first foreign office in Mexico City, well before the passage of NAFTA. Because of her practice expertise and her unique understanding of the business culture, Rona was then asked to serve on behalf of the U.S. Department of State as a member of the NAFTA Advisory Committee on Alternative Dispute Resolution.

In her role as the first lawyer to serve as the head of our firm’s marketing and business development department, Rona was responsible for the development of our firm’s first Web site, our first brand architecture, and the forerunner of our firm’s unique logo. At the time, her innovation was almost heresy. Today, we revel in the compliments we receive from our clients and peers about the unique nature of these things.

To say the very least, the partners of Haynes and Boone are all very proud of what Rona accomplished in her legal career, and we are extremely proud to have had her as our partner. I count myself as so very fortunate to have been influenced and mentored by her.